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## A STUDY OF 150 DELINQUENT BOYS

BY

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## A STUDY OF 150 DELINQUENT BOYS

THIS study was undertaken as a part of a general survey of the Whittier State School, at Whittier, California. The survey, which was made at the request of the superintendent of the School, included (1) a study of the administrative needs of the institution; (2) the determination of the physical condition of the inmates, from the standpoint of medical inspection; (3) a study of the needs with reference to educational reorganization; and (4) the determination of the intelligence level of each of the boys.\*

The Buckel Foundation was called upon to apply intelligence tests for the determination of mental ages. The other divisions of the survey were conducted by Dr. E. B. Hoag, Chief Physician to the Juvenile Court, Los Angeles; and E. J. Lickley, Superintendent of Special Education, Los Angeles City Schools. Approximately seven weeks were spent at the School, giving tests and collecting supplementary data. The material was later subjected to careful analysis in the research laboratory of the Buckel Foundation, Stanford University. The final report included the results in detail, together with a brief individual report on each boy.

The Whittier School is one of the two California state institutions for delinquent and dependent boys. Its chief aim is to provide a home for such boys, and to train each in the practice of some useful trade. Equipment consists of facilities for training in all of the ordinary trades usually taught in industrial schools. Special emphasis is laid upon agriculture, dairying, gardening, plumbing, carpentering, masonry, tailoring, baking, and printing. As in other schools of its kind, hope for reform is based largely upon the possibilities in industrial training.

At the time of this study there were approximately 150 in-

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\*The intelligence tests were carried out under the direction of Dr. Lewis M. Terman, Stanford University.

mates. The lowest age was  $10\frac{1}{2}$  years, and the highest 21. The median age was  $16\frac{1}{2}$ , two-thirds of the boys being within two years of that age. The racial percentage was as follows:

Native white .....	64	per cent
Indian or Mexican descent.....	21	" "
Colored .....	15	" "

The boys were examined by the use of the Stanford Revision of the Binet-Simon Measuring Scale of Intelligence. This revision comprises the most carefully standardized and accurately graded group of tests yet devised for measuring the intelligence level. It is particularly superior to other revisions of the Binet-Simon Scale in the examination of delinquent boys, because of the demonstrated accuracy of the upper years of the Scale (15, 16, 17, 18), in which years the ages of delinquent boys most commonly fall.

The tests were carefully given, under uniform conditions, and the records were compared with those of over 2000 public school children. Considerable attention was given to supplementary data, including information as to home conditions, social status, school opportunities, physical condition, etc., together with records of progress made since commitment to the School.

The general level of intelligence among the boys in the institution was found to be very considerably below the average for non-selected school children of corresponding age. While the median chronological age was  $16\frac{1}{2}$  years, the median mental age was found to be  $12\frac{1}{2}$ . Thus, on the whole, the group is fully four years below normal in intelligence level. The comparison is shown in chart I.

The boys were classified into four groups according to grade of intelligence. A summary of the results follows:

Definitely feeble-minded .....	28	per cent
Borderline .....	25	" "
"Dull normal" .....	22	" "
Normal or above .....	25	" "

The surprising equality of these groups, in percentages, is significant when it is remembered that approximately 75 per cent

of any group of ordinary school children fall into the last named group, and of the remaining 25 per cent some 23 or 24 per cent into the "Dull normal" and Borderline groups, leaving only 1, or 2 per cent for the feeble-minded group. Feeble-mindedness, then, is from 15 to 25 times as common among these delinquent boys as among ordinary school children.

It may be well to state at this point that Goddard's definition of feeble-mindedness has been used in this study, and those considered feeble-minded whose mental development indicates that they will never attain a mentality beyond that of the normal child of twelve years. The Borderline group consists of those

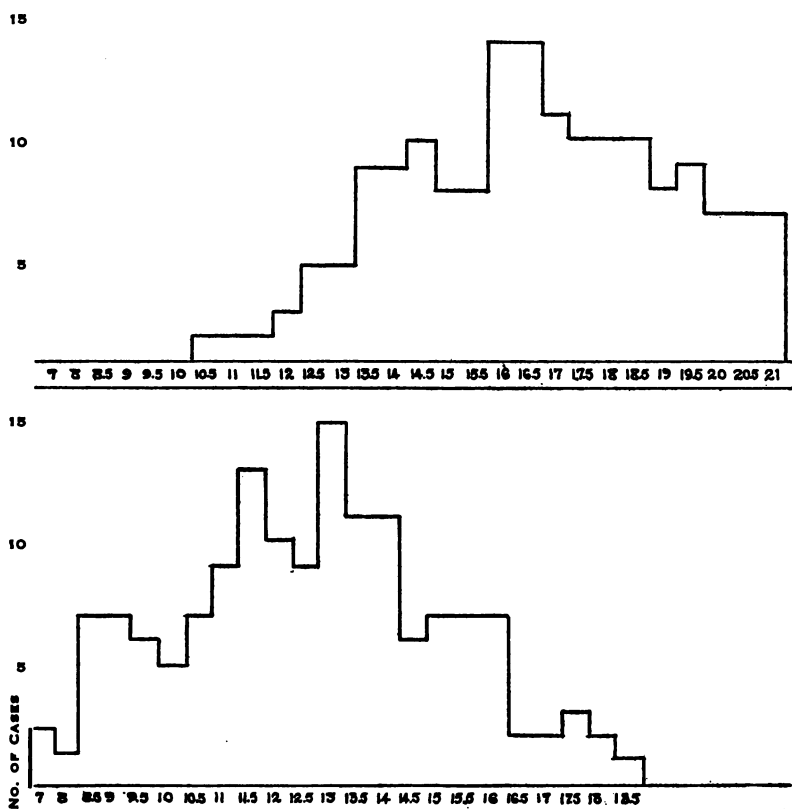


CHART I.—*Above*: distribution of chronological ages.  
*Below*: distribution of mental ages.

who are likely to develop just a little beyond twelve years. The "Dull normal" group includes those who are backward to such an extent that they cannot be considered average-normal, but whose mental retardation is not very serious.

Of those classified as feeble-minded, all belong to the moron grade of defectiveness. Further analysis of the data shows the following divisions of this group:

High-grade morons .....	14.5 per cent
Middle-grade morons .....	11.3 " "
Low-grade morons .....	2.0 " "

A few cases from the moron group have been selected as examples to indicate the amount of deficiency in this group:

Case No.	Chronological age	Mental age
1 .....	12 .....	7
2 .....	12 .....	7½
3 .....	13½ .....	8½
4 .....	14 .....	9½
5 .....	15 .....	8½
6 .....	18 .....	8½
7 .....	18½ .....	8½
8 .....	19½ .....	9½
9 .....	20 .....	8½
10 .....	21 .....	8½

The foregoing classification and figures are, of course, tentative. Further investigation and study of individual cases would possibly change the percentages to a slight extent. It is very unlikely, however, that the amount of defectiveness would be found to be less. Much care has been exercised in the examinations and in tabulating the data, and the figures given are conservative in the extreme. In all probability, further study would increase, rather than decrease, the percentages of feeble-minded and borderline cases.

The school opportunities of these boys, with individual exceptions, have not been greatly inferior to those of ordinary children. While the amount of absence due to truancy is in many cases large, and has doubtless interfered seriously with school progress, yet the data indicate that this has been of little conse-



quence as a factor in the mental retardation disclosed by the tests. Unusual susceptibility to influence, evidences of inability to properly comprehend situations, the absurdity of some of the offenses committed, and other facts of common observation forcefully substantiate the results of the tests and show this group of boys to be of decidedly inferior intelligence. Especially is this manifest in the problems confronting the officers and instructors who have in hand the difficult task of training and vocational guidance. The factor of delinquency is a much less disturbing element than that of undeveloped mentality.

Herbert L— is 18 years of age. His mentality is about  $8\frac{1}{2}$ . His mental development has practically ceased, and he can never be expected to compete for his living in the world with normal men. He is large and strong physically, however, and is able, under close and constant supervision, to do tasks requiring much muscle and little thought. He could perhaps be trained to do such work as caring for stock, heavier farm work, etc., and if placed in the proper care should be fairly able to earn his living. But he is a potential criminal, and the several acts which he has committed indicate that if he were permitted to be at large upon his own responsibility, his lower nature would overpower what little judgment he has, and that he would eventually become a ward of the state and a permanent burden to society. He should no more be held responsible for his delinquency than a child of eight years would be for the same offense. He is one of the lowest grade cases, and properly belongs in an institution for the feeble-minded rather than in a school for delinquents.

Anson C— is an example of the middle-grade moron. Age 15. Mentality  $8\frac{1}{2}$ . He came from a home where immoral and vicious conduct is common, and his native endowment is low in every direction. Anson stole money on several occasions, and was unable to state what he did with it. He is very easily influenced, and apparently several older persons have taken advantage of this weakness. Although taken into several different homes for adoption, he showed little improvement, and when not watched quickly reverted to his former conduct. His mental development is unlikely to go beyond ten years, and he will in all probability always need careful supervision. He should



be placed in an institution for higher grade defectives, and trained in some sort of work by which he may be of use.

Adolph W—. Age 20. Mentality about 11½. Is foreign born, and although given public school advantages he has been unable to acquire an intelligent use of English. A good example of the mentally defective immigrant. Has become a burden to the society in which he has been permitted to enter, and had best be placed in an institution for mental defectives, lest his potential criminality develop still further.

Ellison V—. Aged 20. Mentality about 9½. A good-looking boy, polite and obedient. Scarcely any one upon first seeing him would suspect mental deficiency. In the tests he was absolutely unable to interpret fables, to put together a simple disconnected sentence, or to give a reasonable reproduction of a short newspaper article read to him. His vocabulary is very low, and he can define words only by means of a low type of definition. His interests are in working with machinery, and he is said to have more or less "mechanical genius." No doubt he is more capable in this direction than in any other, but he is unlikely to ever become socially responsible. It is improbable that his "genius" will enable him to get along without permanent supervision.

Archie S—. Age 20. Mentality a little above 12. Belongs to the Borderline group. A case of low intelligence, below normal, and yet slightly above those who have been classified as feeble-minded. Will be able to do independent work of a reasonably simple nature, but is unlikely to be able to cope successfully with difficult social and industrial problems alone. Should be assigned a permanent location, where such tasks as he can do will be given him, and kindly treatment afforded. Family history shows alcoholism, criminality, and degeneracy.

Morris T—. Age 18. Belongs to the dull-normal group. Is physically strong and able. Likes horses and outside work, and should make a fairly good teamster. Family conditions bad. Alcoholism in both father and mother. Indications of potential viciousness are evident. The boy early became addicted to the use of tobacco and alcohol, and at an early age lost interest in school work. Mentality, however, is decidedly superior to those in the preceding groups. Will pass anywhere for a workman of ordinary intelligence, and among laboring people is likely

to do fairly well. He has a sister in another school for delinquents.

Jules N—. Age 21. Mentality normal. A good example of the intellectually normal delinquent. The family from which he comes is a group of moral degenerates, and Jules is no exception to the rule. Of the twelve children, six have been committed to institutions for delinquents; at least three of those remaining are feeble-minded, and one is a prostitute. The father's side shows inherited alcoholism and the mother was an epileptic. This family furnishes splendid argument for the need of research and follow-up work, together with other means of investigation into the causes and consequences of such family adoptions by the state. Several of these children have shown tendencies to extreme delinquency, and the effect of the training given them by the State School should be carefully sought out.

Jules has been in the School for nine years. During that time he has become a first-class carpenter, and will be able to compete industrially on equal terms with ordinary men. The training of the school has made a profound impression upon him, and his removal from the many temptations of the environment in which he was brought up, and the substitution of industrial ideals, have fully justified the expenditure which the State has made in providing for him.

Analysis of the races represented in the institution showed the following percentages of feeble-mindedness:

White .....	6 per cent
Colored .....	48 " "
Mexican and Indian .....	60 " "

The existence of these differences is of great significance to institutions for juvenile offenders, a large percentage of those committed being other than white. In the Whittier School 36% are of negro or Indian descent. While the negro population of California constitute but 0.9% of the total, yet the results of this study indicate that more than 15% of the juvenile delinquents committed to the state institution are of that race.

In Chart II the offenses and other reasons for commitment are classified according to the number of cases of each, and also in regard to the intelligence grouping. While the chart is self-

explanatory, the following points seem deserving of special mention:

1. The few cases of normality among incorrigibles.
2. The absence of feeble-minded cases among those committed for forgery.
3. The absence of normal cases among the dependents.
4. The considerable amount of defectiveness in all kinds of offenses.

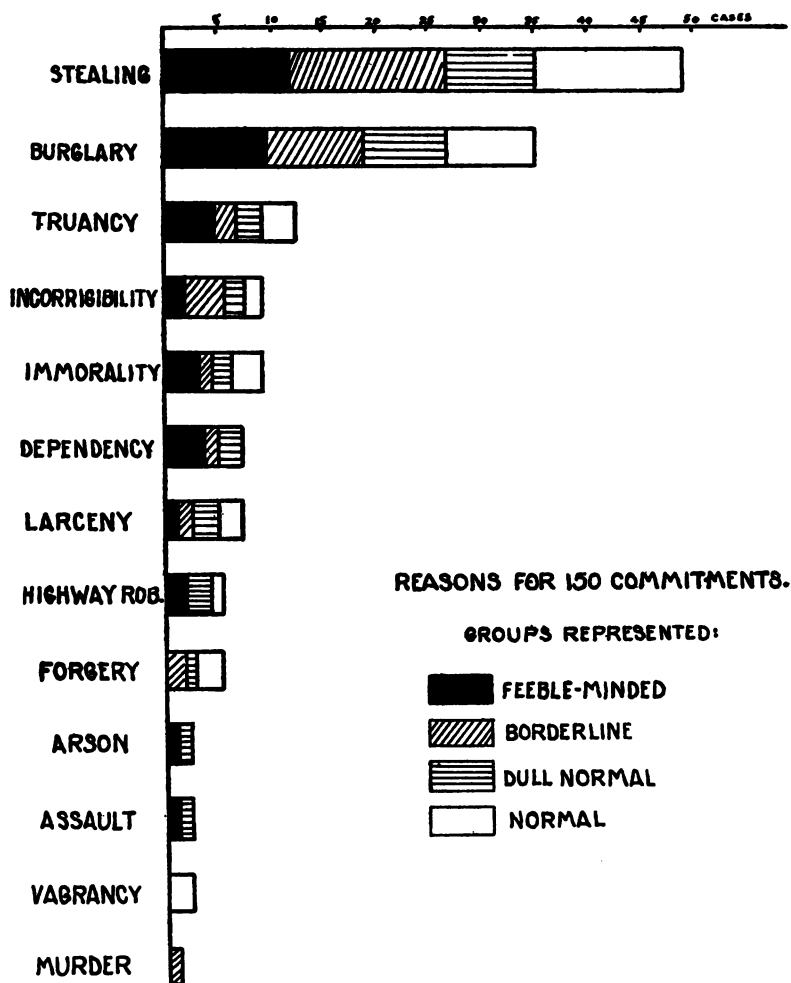


CHART II

These offenses committed by juvenile delinquents constitute a problem of which further study is needed. Although many are committed for small misdemeanors, yet some have approached crimes of as serious consequence as those of confirmed criminals.

While the institution exists for dependent boys as well as for delinquents, the number shown on the chart who have been committed for that reason alone is comparatively small. The reason for this is the statement which often accompanies a "dependent" boy, to the effect that he has "also" been found guilty of one or more of these acts of delinquency. He cannot be treated, therefore, as merely a dependant, but is for institutional purposes on a par with the others.

The results of this investigation show the need for better provisions for delinquent children. A state parental home is an urgent need in California. This is strengthened by the fact that mental deficiency so often exists among such children. It is now generally acknowledged that the feeble-minded child is a potential delinquent. When this is found to be true even among those who have good homes, to how much greater extent must it hold for boys and girls who are denied the advantages of parental guidance! The obvious saving to the state in caring for these children and offering special training to meet their needs, rather than attempting to bring about "reform" after they have committed one or several delinquent acts, warrants special consideration—not only by the state officials, but by the tax-payers as well.

That progress in school has had little or no bearing on the degree of mental deficiency among the boys has already been suggested. Since the Whittier group, however, are below the average intelligence of school children of the same ages, the public school conditions which they have met have, in some cases, unquestionably favored the development of their potential delinquency. Although exact information regarding school training was difficult to obtain, the data collected disclose the following facts:

1. That among this group of delinquents there has been much truancy;
2. That many have been expelled or otherwise dismissed from school before a reasonable amount of school training had been received;

3. That this dismissal from school has been most frequent in towns where no provision has been made for special instruction for exceptional or unruly children ;
4. That many boys have left school at an early age because of the lack or inadequacy of opportunity for industrial training or vocational guidance ;
5. That few of these boys have remained in school more than eight years ; and that 50% have remained in school less than six years ;\*
6. That 10% of the boys above 15 years of age have been in school less than three years.
7. That of 126 boys who should normally be expected to reach the eighth grade, only 18 have succeeded in doing so.

Such findings emphasize the importance of industrial schools in the educational system of the state. Thousands of dollars are being annually expended in attempting to educate in the common schools a class of boys to whom they are not adapted, and who are unwilling to remain in them long enough to receive adequate training to fit them for life.

That the solution of the problem lies in the enforcement of attendance laws can no longer be maintained. The schools must be made to fit the individuals, rather than attempting to fit the individuals into an environment to which they are unable to adapt themselves. The following needs of the territory from which boys have been committed to the Whittier School are probably of no less importance in any other section of the state :

1. Special classes for backward, unruly, or otherwise exceptional children. These are particularly needed in the smaller towns and cities.
2. A state institution for higher grade defectives.
3. A state parental school for dependent children.
4. Provisions in the public schools, especially in the smaller cities and towns, for vocational guidance and industrial training.
5. In connection with at least one institution in the state for juvenile delinquents and dependants, a well organized department of research.

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\*This does not include the amount of absence on account of truancy.

In submitting a report to the institution in regard to this study, special emphasis was laid upon the need for organized research. The value of this work cannot be easily over-estimated. With the coming into the field of trained and experienced men, with the rapid development of clinical psychology, strengthened by the increased reliability of improved tests of intelligence, new methods and comparative data for the study of heredity, and with the general recognition of the added efficiency made possible by the application of standardized measurement of educational results, the importance of such work cannot be overlooked by the institution which would be truly modern.

The facts brought to light in this and other studies of a like nature are in need of further investigation. While occasional surveys are always suggestive, they cannot be expected to be sufficiently conclusive or inclusive to afford the institution all the information which is needed to carry on its work efficiently.

The history of the family in two or three cases was investigated, and the genealogy charted. In each of these cases, the influence of heredity can be plainly seen. A brief survey of the historical data obtainable shows that in 17% of the cases committed to this institution, one or more members of the immediate family have been committed upon similar charges. In some cases the parents have been delinquent, or even criminal, and often there is evidence of mental deficiency in the family. In at least two instances the boy's mother has "graduated" from the Whittier School for Girls. In still other cases there is no evidence of deficiency or delinquency in the family, and there is apparently nothing whatever to account for the condition of the boy. The existence of these cases alone is sufficient to demonstrate the urgent need for a research department.

The superintendent of the School has indicated that he is no longer satisfied with occasional reports concerning boys who have been dismissed or paroled. The collection of these even now encroaches upon the time of the probation officer, whose duties are of such importance that he should be relieved from statistical work. Other officers and instructors are finding their work crippled by the lack of information, not only in regard to the special nature of the case which they have in hand, but also as to the efficiency of their work as shown by the degree of success won by the boy as the result of their efforts.



At the request of the superintendent, a prominent place in the report submitted was devoted to a plan for the establishment of a department of research. The proposed plan, in brief, was as follows:

#### I. GENERAL FUNCTIONS OF THE DEPARTMENT.

It should be the function of the Department of Research:

1. To determine the mental and physical status of each boy upon entering the school;
2. To inquire into his social status, and to collect data concerning his educational training, opportunities, and other environmental factors;
3. To investigate the nature and causes of his delinquency, dependency, or other reason for commitment;
4. To collect data concerning his personal history, and that of his family, and to inquire into any factors which might throw light upon the hereditary and environmental influences;
5. To give mental and physical tests at regular intervals during his stay, and to advise with the superintendent and other officials concerning the training he is to receive;
6. To obtain information regarding his conduct and degree of success after he has been dismissed or paroled from the school;
7. To carry on detailed investigation as to the causes and consequences of juvenile delinquency, dependency, and other problems relating to the work of the school.

#### II. STAFF OF THE DEPARTMENT OF RESEARCH.

The Department should have as its director a psychologist. He should have general supervision over all work done in the department, and be directly responsible to the superintendent for the carrying out of its functions.

There should be, under his direction,

1. An assistant psychologist, who should be qualified to give mental and physical tests;
2. A clerical assistant, for making records and tabulating data.
3. At least one field worker, for investigation into the factors of heredity, environment, etc., and to follow up the record of the boys after dismissal or during parole.

In addition, the medical department of the school should co-operate with the department of research wherever the lines of investigation require such service. There should be available also the services of a neurologist when required.

### III. THE RESEARCH LABORATORY.

The laboratory should be equipped with all necessary apparatus for mental and physical testing, ample facilities for making and keeping permanent records, both of individual cases and of groups. There should be a professional library, containing important psychological and educational works, together with current and bound numbers of periodicals relating to the work.

The department should be so provided that communication and exchange could be carried on with other departments of research, and with universities where investigations are being made. The director of the department should frequently issue bulletins, that the results of the work might be made available to others.

This study is by no means conclusive as to the nature of delinquency in California, or as to the relation which mental deficiency bears to the problem. The juvenile courts, the county and city probation officers, truant officials and others have doubtless uncovered many facts and conditions which have a direct relation to this survey. Without facilities for investigation, and the collecting of this data, the State School is denied the possession of what might often prove to be of the greatest importance in the solution of its many and varied problems.

It has been the purpose of this preliminary survey to indicate the possibilities which lie in this direction, and to show, in brief, the value of an organized department in attacking the problem.